

City Council Strategic Planning
Public Safety – Goal #6;
The City Protects the Safety and Security of its Residents, Businesses, and Visitors
November 18, 2009
4:00pm
Alexandria Fire Department
Station 209
2800 Main Line Boulevard

In Attendance (and contact phone numbers):

Vice-Mayor Kerry Donley (703.746.4500)
Councilman Frank Fannon (703.746.4500)
Assistant City Manager Michele Evans (703.746.4300)
Assistant City Manager Tom Gates (703.746.3716)
Dana Lawhorne, Sheriff (703.746.4114)
Fire Chief Adam Thiel (703.706.3953)
Police Deputy Chief Blaine Corle (703.838.6336)
Undersheriff Tony Davis (703.746.5008)
John Catlett, Fire Code Administration (703.746.4182)
Assoc. Director Liz Wixson, Mental Health/Retardation/Substance Abuse (703.746.3577)
Pamela Copley, Emergency Medical Services Council (703.909.4168)
Karen Helbrecht, Local Emergency Management Committee (703.548.5784)
Melinda Douglas, Public Defender (703.747.4477)
Heidi Meinzer, Community Criminal Justice Board (703.525.4000)
Tom Walezkyowski, Citizen Corps Council (703.461.9206)
Dan Rosenblatt, International Association of Chiefs of Police (703.836.6767 x201)
Jeffrey Washington, American Correctional Association (703.224.0103)
Claire Dunn, Office on Women (703.838.4911)
Michael Wenk, Budget/Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee (703.998.6796)
Mike Mackay, Gang Prevention, Court Services Unit (703.746.4496)

Minutes prepared by: Cameron Hall, Alexandria Fire Department (703.706.3953)

At the previous meeting, each of the Public Safety Departments gave a brief overview of roles and responsibilities. In order to gain a broader knowledge of each department and the needs to be addressed by this Strategic Planning process, each group will discuss challenges with input invited from the expert panel.

Each Department expressed difficulty meeting increasing demands with reduced staff numbers. Police, Fire, and Sheriff may need to cut services not essential for public safety in the upcoming budget year. Examples include Police funeral escorts and honor guard appearances.

Pay and compensation issues remain a challenge for each Department as well. Jurisdictions often advertise job openings to surrounding areas with hopes of hiring trained, experienced personnel. While this may be a generational issue, it is important to increase retention. It is increasingly

expensive to hire, train, and certify employees in these positions. For example, it takes, on average, one year for a Deputy Sheriff to acquire mandated Virginia Certification.

While each Department receives many applications for employment, actual hiring numbers are low. Each applicant goes through a tedious process of written and physical agility tests, and background, polygraph, and physical examinations. Even after hire, acquiring and maintaining mandated state and federal certifications can also be expensive.

The Sheriff's Office must also now contend with budget cuts to mental health programs. Prisoners to the jail suffering mental health problems are expensive and dangerous to employees. The facility is not equipped to handle these types of inmates, but without alternative programs, there are no other options. Creating diversion programs for these types of offenders, especially those with mental health problems will alleviate some of these issues. The last group home to open in Alexandria was over 10 years ago and those are subject to cuts in next year's budget.

The Fire Department facilities, equipment and staffing levels, and training have not kept pace with surrounding jurisdictions and needs complete modernization. As presented in the last meeting, Alexandria increasingly relies on mutual aid for medic support. It is not uncommon for the Department to exhaust the supply of medic units by mid-day.

In addition, the Office of Building and Fire Code Administration, a division of the Fire Department, is watching demand increase for new construction without sufficient staff to maintain inspection levels. As the economy continues to improve, the need for inspectors will increase partly due to already low staff numbers and many leaving city employment for better paying trade work. Due to state mandates, it can take up to 3 years to fully train and certify an inspector.

Vice Mayor Donley, Councilman Fannon, and Chief Thiel will work on a draft plan including goals and initiatives before the next meeting. The next meeting will be held on Thursday, December 3 at 4pm at Fire Station 209 in the conference room on the first floor.

Please also note that all presentations, notes, videos, and background documents have been placed on the City Website and may be accessed by logging onto alexandriava.gov.